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# THE NATION

## FOREIGN RELATIONS

### Grand Illusion

Men rarely give up their illusions, even when these illusions are scraped away by the sharp edges of reality. For John F. Kennedy, that process has been going on painfully since Inauguration Day. Last week, when a U.S.-backed invasion of Cuba went catastrophically awry, the young President got a lesson about the peril of holding onto his illusions.

Despite the tone of somber realism in his campaign speeches and his inaugural address, President Kennedy came into office cherishing some naive notions about the possibilities of easing cold-war tensions through rational negotiation—and about the extent to which the shrewd tactics that had carried him so far in U.S. politics would serve him in trying to cope with Communism. "Let us never negotiate out of fear," Kennedy said in his inaugural address, "but let us never fear to negotiate." But what had sabotaged negotiation during the Eisenhower Administration was not fear of negotiation; it was the Communists' underlying hostility to the West, and relentless dedication to ultimate world domination.

John F. Kennedy has spent his first 100 presidential days in learning such facts of cold-war life. Instead of granting the six-

month lull that Kennedy had asked for, Nikita Khrushchev intensified the cold-war with guerrilla warfare in Laos and Cuba.

version in South Viet Nam, and increased arms shipments to Cuba.

**Propaganda Windfall.** When the President tried to halt the Communist thrust in Laos by proposing a cease-fire and a neutral status, with official hints of a U.S. "response" if the Communists did not accept his plan, his countrymen gave him plaudits for his coolness and courage. But in stark fact, Kennedy's move failed to achieve anything against the cunning and purposefulness of Nikita Khrushchev. The Russians have simply stalled on a cease-fire, and meanwhile the buildup of Communist arms in Laos has continued. The tuition fee for Kennedy's foreign-policy education in Laos may be the loss of that country to Communism.

The lessons of Cuba, in contrast, came with jolting swiftness. Again, Kennedy underestimated his adversary and overestimated the realism of his own expectations. In backing the invasion of Cuba by a force of U.S.-trained Cuban exiles, Kennedy hoped to bring down Fidel Castro's Communist regime in Cuba without stirring too many international accusations of "imperialism" and "colonialism" against the U.S. But the bungled invasion ended in a massacre. And the onlooking nations blamed the U.S. for the invasion almost as shrilly as if Kennedy had sent in the Marines. Seizing the propaganda windfall, Khrushchev spectacularly denounced the invasion as "a crime which has revolted the entire world."

**Double Scar.** Great nations are always criticized when they appear aggressive. They are despised when they seem weak. By backing an inadequate and mismanaged invasion attempt, President Kennedy achieved the unhappy feat of making the U.S. seem both aggressive and weak at the same time. Victory would have brought outcries against "imperialism," but at least it would have been victory. Said a Latin American diplomat to a U.S. diplomat at the U.N.: "You succeeded in Guatemala, and that left a scar. You failed in Cuba, and that will leave a double scar."

Coming so soon after the Russian man-in-space triumph, the Cuba fiasco seriously damaged U.S. prestige—a subject on which Kennedy had orated too glibly during the campaign. The country's prestige would rise again, and in his actions since the debacle, the President indicated

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BY NICHOLAS

The old dictator was crowing.

### Bitter Week

At 5:15 one morning last week, President Kennedy's military aide, Brigadier General Chester Clifton, got an urgent telephone call. He told the caller to telephone the President at his weekend home in Middleburg, Va. Shortly afterward, in keeping with instructions he had given, the President was awakened and told that an invasion force of Cuban revolutionaries had landed as planned on the south coast of Cuba. So began John F. Kennedy's darkest and bitterest week as President.

Soon after he took office in January, Kennedy was faced with making a command decision on Cuba. His early hopes of avoiding clashes with Fidel Castro had rapidly faded. Now the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency urged upon him a project that the CIA had been working on for months during the Eisenhower Administration: an invasion by U.S.-trained Cuban refugees, with the U.S. providing air cover and logistical support. Shockingly misinformed, the CIA assured the President that the invasion would touch off uprisings against Castro and massive defections from his armed forces.

**"The Great Revolution."** Fearful that open U.S. help for the invasion would turn Latin Americans, Asians and Africans against the U.S., the President vetoed air cover and logistical support. But accepting the CIA's assurances about uprisings and defections, he approved a too-skimpy, all-Cuban invasion that was doomed to bloody defeat. Secretary of State Dean Rusk went along with the plan, and so did the top foreign policy thinkers on the White House staff: Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., McGeorge Bundy and Walt Whitman Rostow. Under Secretary of State Charles Bowles opposed the project, somewhat deviously, by looking to the press stories of shrapnel conflict with the Administration. The move was taken by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Foreign Relations Committee Chairman William

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The young President was learning.

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